

Message Text

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ACTION INR-10

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 SS-15 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSC-05
/041 W

-----084478 290621Z /11-L

R 280646Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3787
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 12308

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, MY, TH
SUBJECT: EXTERNAL RESEARCH CONTRACT FOR STUDY OF SEPARA-
TISTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

REF: STATE 103770

1. EMBASSY HAS GIVEN CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO THE PROPOSAL
CONTAINED IN REFTEL, REGARDING DEPARTMENT FINANCING OF PART
OF SIX WEEKS' RESEARCH PROJECT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND BY
PROF. ASTRI SIHRKE OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN JUNE-JULY.
AS PART OF HER STUDY PROF. SUHRKE WOULD REPORTEDLY FOCUS ON
THE STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSLIM SEPARATIST MOVEMENT
IN SOUTHERN THAILAND AS WELL AS QUESTION OF EXTERNAL CONTACT
AND SUPPORT.

2. DURING SUMMER OF 1977 DR. LADD THOMAS OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY (DE KALB, ILL.) CONDUCTED RESEARCH IN SOUTHERN
THAILAND ALONG LINES SIMILAR TO THOSE PROPOSED BY PROF.
SUHRKE. DR. THOMAS HAS BEEN WELL AND FAVORABLY KNOWN TO
THE EMBASSY FOR MANY YEARS AS A SPECIALIST ON SOUTHERN
THAILAND, PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH ON HIS OWN, AT
NO COST TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. IT IS NOT RPT
NOT CLEAR TO THE EMBASSY WHY THE U.S.G. SHOULD COMMIT
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FUNDS TO PROF. SUHRKE TO SUPPORT RESEARCH DUPLICATING WHAT
IS ALREADY BEING DONE BY A WELL-KNOWN AMERICAN SPECIALIST
IN THE AREA.

3. WE HAVE VERY SERIOUS RESERVATIONS ABOUT U.S.G. INVOLVEMENT
IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT. AS THE DEPT HAS NOTED IN REFTEL,
U.S.G. FUNDING OF RESEARCH ON A SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE

SENSITIVITY TO BOTH THE RTG AND THE GOM COULD BE MINISTER-
PRETED. INDEED, WE BELIEVE THAT THE RTG WOULD BE CONCERNED
ABOUT SUCH U.S.G. SUPPORT. MOREOVER, AS PROF. SUHRKE PURSUES
HER RESEARCH, SHE IS CERTAIN TO COME TO THE ATTENTION OF THAI
SECURITY OFFICIALS IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONTACTS SHE WILL BE
MAKING WITH MUSLIM GROUPS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND. WE
WOULD NOT RPT NOT LIKE TO SEE A SITUATION WHICH COULD BE
MISCONSTRUED AS A QUASI-COVERT FUNDING OF RESEARCH BY ANOTHER
COUNTRY'S NATIONAL IN A HIGHLY SENSITIVE AREA. WE DO NOT
KNOW PROF. SUHRKE'S VIEWS. HOWEVER, IF SHE DOMONSTRATES
TOO GREAT AN INTEREST IN OR SYMPATHY FOR THE MUSLIM
SEPARATISTS, OUR SUPPORT FOR HER COULD BE MINISTERPRETED
AS REFLECTING U.S.G. POLICIES.

4. IN ADDITION, THE PROVISION OF U.S.FUNDS FOR THIS
PROJECT WILL INEVITABLY INVOLVE A MEASURE OF U.S. RESPON-
SIBILITY FOR PROF. SUHRKE'S SECURITY WHILE SHE CONDUCTS
HER RESEARCH. IN THIS CONNECTION OUR CONSUL IN SONGKHLA
HAS COMMENTED THAT WHILE MINIMAL , WE CANNOT EXCLUDE POSSIB-
ILITY THAT A THREAT TO HER PHYSICAL SECURITY WILL EXIST,
SINCE SHE WILL BE OPERATING IN AN AREA IN WHICH BANDITRY
AND KIDNAPPING ARE ENDEMIC AND A SEPARATIST MOVEMENT EXISTS.
THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN LIGHT OF THE INTENSIFIED ACTIVITIES
OF PULO (PATTANI UNITED LIBERATION ORGANIZATION), ALTHOUGH OUR
CONSUL NOTES THAT PULO HAS NOT YET SPECIFICALLY TARGETTED
FOREIGNERS. WE DO NOT RPT NOT WISH TO OVERSTATE THIS, HOWEVER,
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IF SHE EVER WERE INVOLVED IN AN INCIDENT, WE COULD NOT CREDIBLY
DENY U.S.G. INVOLVEMENT AND WOULD BE HARD PUT TO AVOID
SUSPICION OF DELIBERATE USE OF RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR
ESPIONAGE PURPOSES.

5. IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, THE EMBASSY RE-
PLIES AS FOLLOWS TO THE DEPARTMENT'S QUESTIONS IN PARA 3
OF REFTEL:

A) THE EMBASSY PERCEIVES SERIOUS POTENTIAL FOR
EMBARRASSMENT TO U.S. G. FROM THE PRPOSED PROJECT, PAR-
TICULARLY IN VIEW OF THAI SENSITIVITIES TO MUSLIM
SEPARATISTS ACTIVITY.

B) THE EMBASSY BELIEVES IT HIGHLY ADVISABLE FOR
PROF. SUHRKE TO HAVE RTG APPROVAL FOR THIS RESEARCH, IF
IT IS FINANCED IN PART BY THE U.S. G. THE EMBASSY OPPOSES
U.S. SUPPORT FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AS IT CONSIDERS
THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY SUCH SUPPORT TO THE RTG

C) IF WE DID NOT RPT NOT INFORM THE RTG, EMBASSY BE-
LIEVES THAT FACT OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR THIS PROJECT WOULD
INEVITABLY BECOME KNOW TO RTG. PROF. SUHRKE WILL SURELY
FIND IT NECESSARY TO EXPLAIN TO RTG AUTHORITIES WHAT SHE
IS DOING IN SOUTHERN THAILAND AND WHO IS PAYING FOR THE

RESEARCH. EMBASSY WOULD STRONGLY OPPOSE KEEPING THE RTG IN THE DARK ABOUT USG SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT.

D) AS NOTED ABOVE, EMBASSY BELIEVES THERE IS A POSSIBLE THREAT TO PROF. SUHRKE'S PHYSICAL SECURITY. EVEN IF SHE RESIDES IN PATTANI OR YALA PROVINCIAL CAPITALS, SHE WILL NEED TO TRAVEL TO VILLAGES IN THE AREA TO CONDUCT HER RESEARCH.

6. WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT PROF. SUHRKE INTENDS TO CARRY OUT THIS RESEARCH PROGRAM WHETHER OR NOT SHE RECEIVES USG FUNDING IN SUPPORT OF HER EFFORTS. HER DECISION TO PROCEED WITHOUT USG SUPPORT WOULD BE HERS TO MAKE, AND HER CONNECTION WITH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WOULD POSE NO SPECIAL PROBLEMS FROM EMBASSY'S POINT OF VIEW, PARTICULARLY AS CONFIDENTIAL

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SHE IS NOT RPT NOTAMERICAN NATIONAL. IF SHE DECIDES TO PROCEED WITH PROJECT, WITHOUT U.S. FUNDING, EMBASSY WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS SITUATION WITH HER IN BANGKOK, AND AMERICAN CONSUL IN SONGKHLA WOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET WITH HER AS WELL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: RESEARCH, SECESSION, CONTRACTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BANGKO12308
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780183-0629
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978047/aaaaaffy.tel
Line Count: 142
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: cfa761b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION INR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 103770
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3006707
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EXTERNAL RESEARCH CONTRACT FOR STUDY OF SEPARA- TISTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, MY, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/cfa761b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014